

the Hoosier soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 293rd Infantry from the Indiana National Guard, who have become the first National Guard battalion in the Nation to receive the Combat Infantry award since World War II.

The Combat Infantry award is a highly coveted honor given by the Department of the Army to soldiers who have satisfactorily performed infantry duties as part of a unit that participated in ground combat. The Infantry badge honors soldiers who have operated under the worst conditions, yet still successfully performed his or her mission in a combat environment. In addition, medics who supported the soldiers will receive the Combat Medical Badge. I am immensely proud that it is an Indiana battalion that has become the first unit in more than 50 years to earn this distinction.

All members of the battalion will receive the Combat Infantry award as a symbol of our Nation's gratitude for the bravery they demonstrated and the sacrifices they and their families have made during Operation Iraqi Freedom. The 1st Battalion, 293rd Infantry is the first Indiana National Guard unit to go into combat since the Korean war. As this award recognizes, they have made an exemplary return to battle, honoring themselves and their home State of Indiana through their efforts.

The battalion has been stationed in Iraq for nearly 7 months. During their time in Iraq, the soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 293rd Infantry have provided security for the Talil Air Force Base, a key airstrip in Southern Iraq. The unit took over responsibility for the base just days after the war's deadliest battle took place on April 1 too secure control of the airstrip.

I am proud to honor the soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 293rd Infantry. The thoughts and prayers of all Hoosiers are with them as they continue their role in rebuilding Iraq. May God watch over the soldiers as they complete their duty and may God bless the United States of America.

#### HONORING PRIVATE ROBERT MCKINLEY

Mr. President, I also rise today with a heavy heart and deep sense of gratitude to honor the life of a brave young man from Peru, IN. Private Robert McKinley, 23 years old, died in Hamburg, Germany on July 8 after suffering heat stroke the month before while fighting in Mosul, Iraq. Robert joined the Army with his entire life before him. He chose to risk everything to fight for the values Americans hold close to our hearts, in a land halfway around the world.

Robert was the twelfth Hoosier soldier to be killed while serving his country in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Today, I join Robert's family, his friends, and the entire Peru community in mourning his death. While we struggle to bear our sorrow over his death, we can also take pride in the example he set,

bravely fighting to make the world a safer place. It is this courage and strength of character that people will remember when they think of Robert, a memory that will burn brightly during these continuing days of conflict and grief.

Before leaving to fight in Iraq, Robert McKinley promised his grandfather he would be careful, telling him that if there was anything he could do to make our country better, then he wanted to do it. Robert had only been in the Army for 8 months, but had already seen three tours of duty and was serving in the 101st Airborne Division, a unit which played a crucial role in the actions in Iraq.

Robert was born in Peru, IN. He enjoyed fishing for walleye in Canada with his grandfather and participated in Peru's 4-H Club for 10 years. Robert graduated from Peru High School in May 1998. His family says the military provided him with an essential sense of direction. Robert leaves behind his mother, Deborah McKinley, his sister, Kay, and his grandparents, Robert and Pauline Feller.

As I search for words to do justice in honoring Robert McKinley's sacrifice, I am reminded of President Lincoln's remarks as he addressed the families of the fallen soldiers in Gettysburg: "We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here." This statement is just as true today as it was nearly 150 years ago, as I am certain that the impact of Robert McKinley's actions will live on far longer than any record of these words.

It is my sad duty to enter the name of Robert McKinley in the official record of the Senate for his service to this country and for his profound commitment to freedom, democracy and peace. When I think about this just cause in which we are engaged, and the unfortunate pain that comes with the loss of our heroes, I hope that families like Robert's can find comfort in the words of the prophet Isaiah who said, "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces."

May God grant strength and peace to those who mourn, and may God bless the United States of America.

#### TRIBUTE TO PFC. WILFREDO PEREZ, JR.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise to pay tribute to the late Pfc. Wilfredo Perez, Jr., of Norwalk, CT, who was killed in the line of duty last Saturday while guarding a children's hospital in Iraq.

Private Perez, who was 24 years old and served with the 4th Infantry Division, was the third resident of Connecticut to fall in Iraq since the onset

of Operation Iraqi Freedom earlier this year. He made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation—and his bravery and heroism will not be forgotten by the people of Connecticut.

Wilfredo Perez was born in New York City and moved to Connecticut with his father, Wilfredo, Sr. while he was in middle school. He and his family were well-loved in their community, especially around Halloween time when their haunted house was a neighborhood favorite.

Throughout his years at Norwalk High School, Wilfredo Perez became known as a playful, mischievous type—a boy who would show up to Junior Air Force ROTC with his uniform untucked, or with no uniform at all. He left high school early and went to work as a contractor with his father.

A few years later, though, Wilfredo began to change. He made a commitment to turn his life around and earned his GED. Then, a little more than a year ago, he made a commitment to his country by enlisting in the United States Army.

Enlisting in the Armed Forces can mean many things to many people. For Wilfredo Perez, it was a personal challenge—a challenge to better himself, to develop as an individual, to find a sense of direction, and to pave the way for a successful future. Private Perez not only met his own goals he exceeded all expectations.

Shortly before he was transferred to Iraq, Private Perez returned to Norwalk and visited his old high school. His former teachers and principal watched as the boy whose shirt was always untucked strode confidently through the hallways in a pristine military uniform, beaming with pride. He spoke to students in school about his life—about the mistakes that he made, and about the path that he ultimately chose.

For Wilfredo Perez, the United States Army was truly a rewarding, transforming experience. And like so many of our finest men and women whose lives are tragically cut short, there is simply no telling how far he could have gone.

I join the State of Connecticut—and indeed the entire country—in mourning Wilfredo Perez, and in thanking him for his tremendous service to our country. I offer my deepest condolences to his family, his friends, and everyone else whose life was touched by Pfc. Wilfredo Perez.

#### TRIBUTE TO UNITED STATES NAVY CAPTAIN DUDLEY B. BERTHOLD

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, today I honor a great American from the Commonwealth of Kentucky. After 25 years of dedicated service to our country, Captain Dudley B. Berthold of the United States Navy will retire on August 8 of this year. I would like to take a moment to recognize his accomplishments.